Homeless Encampments in Contra Costa Waterways:
Regulatory Constraints, Environmental Imperatives
and Humane Strategies

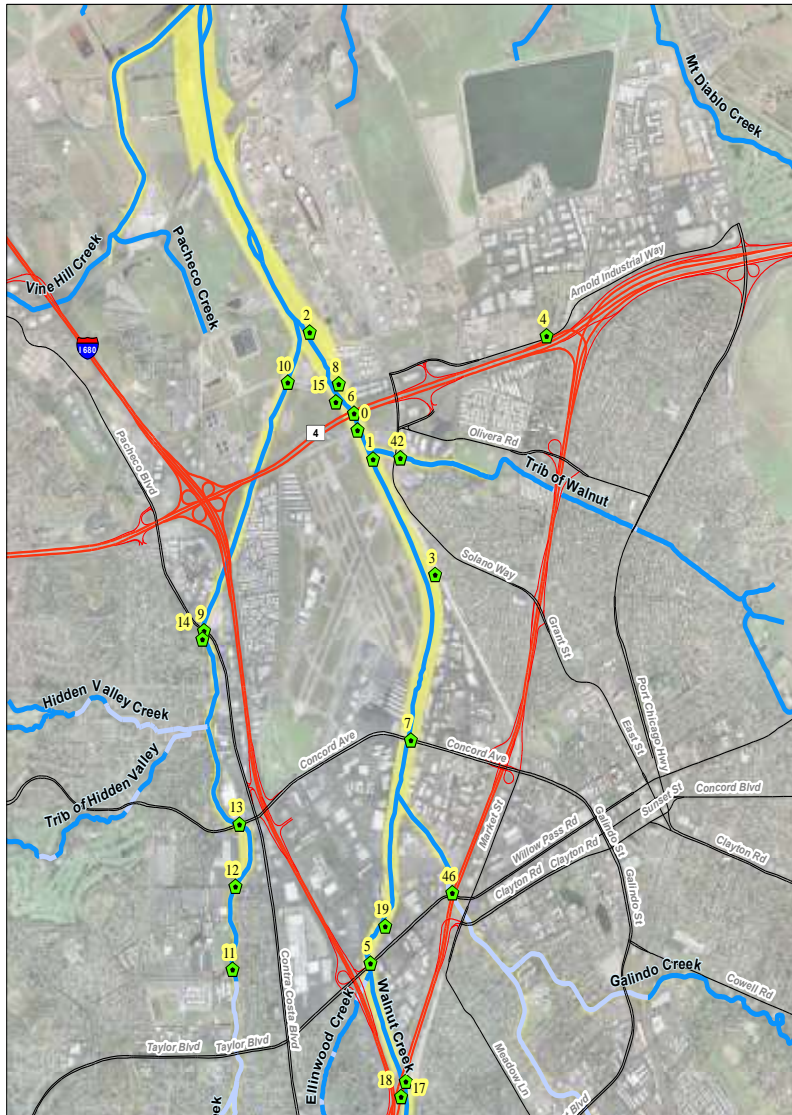# INTRODUCTION

METHODOLOGY

FINDINGS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Last year, CCCFCD spent about 70,000 clearing and cleaning 78 camps. Many of these camps were resettled within days of being cleared. **62 of the 78 cleanups were in 3 sites.**
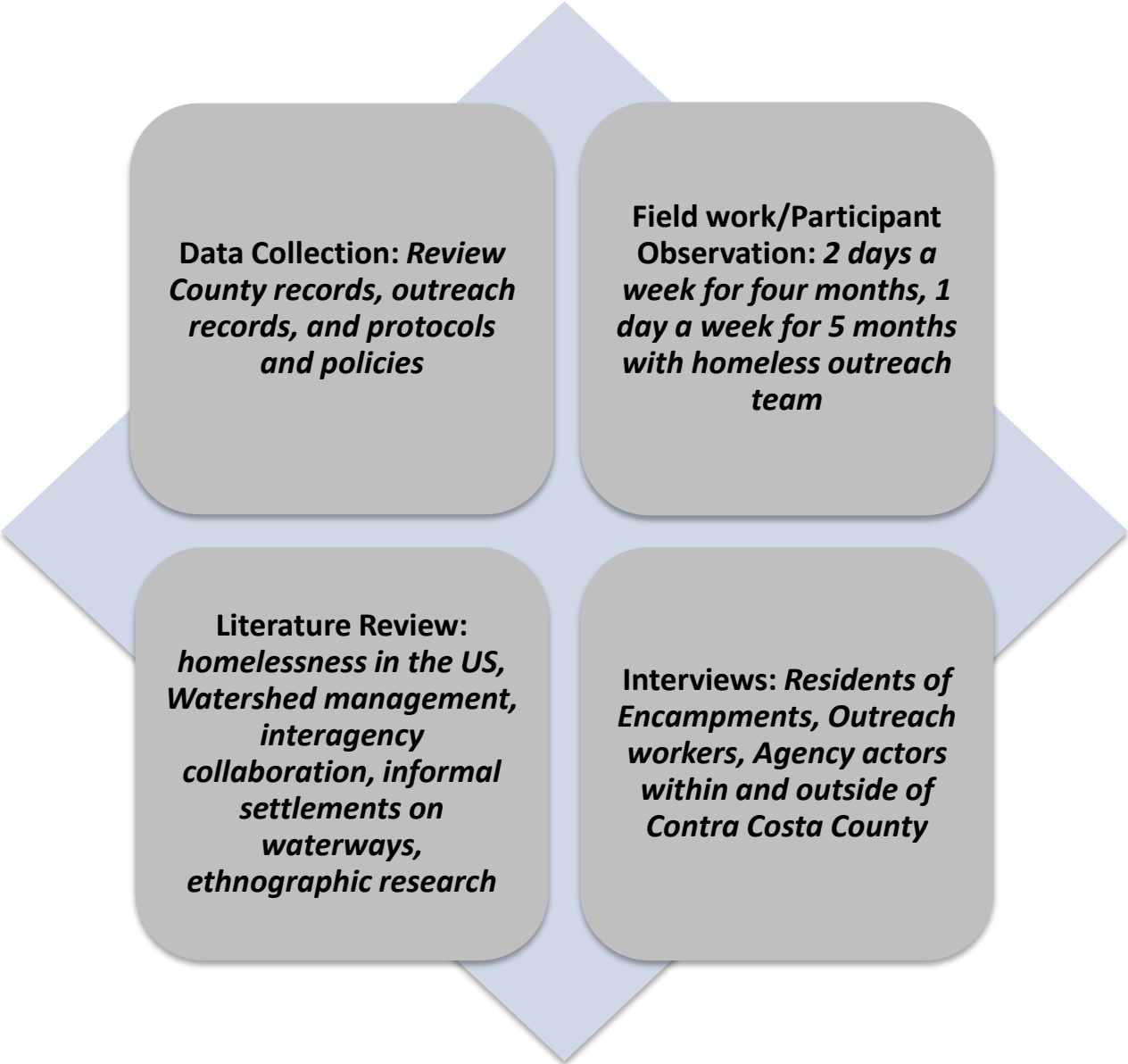
RESEARCH QUESTION:
WHAT ARE VIABLE STRATEGIES FOR CONTRA COSTA COUNTY
TO REDUCE WATER POLLUTION CAUSED BY HOMELESS
ENCAMPMENTS IN A HUMANE MANNER,
AND WHAT ARE THE INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS TO
IMPLEMENTING THESE STRATEGIES?

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection: *Review County records, outreach records, and protocols and policies*

Field work/Participant Observation: *2 days a week for four months, 1 day a week for 5 months with homeless outreach team*

Literature Review: *homelessness in the US, Watershed management, interagency collaboration, informal settlements on waterways, ethnographic research*

Interviews: *Residents of Encampments, Outreach workers, Agency actors within and outside of Contra Costa County*

FINDINGS: History of Homelessness

1925-40: Social welfare programs, federal and municipal housing

1980-1990: Emergency shelters, continuum of care programs

2005-Present: ?

Depression Era Homeless: Mostly male, migratory In stems at edge of cities and shantytowns near railroads

Urban Homeless: Diverse, many with mental health issues In urban centers

Encampments: Mostly male, high number of veterans On public lands, at edge of cities

Shrinking economy, lack of social programs, Unemployment

Federal Disinvestment, Urban Poverty, De-institutionalization

Continued federal Disinvestment, urban gentrification housing crisis, policing

More than one in five of the nations' homeless reside in California. Four of the five cities with the largest number of unsheltered homeless are in California.

Nationwide:
Estimated 634,000 homeless
44% of homeless are unsheltered
18% of homeless are chronically homeless
Homeless in Encampments tend to be single, older single non-white men with dual mental health and substance abuse diagnosis

Contra Costa:
Estimated of 15,000 Homeless
Chronically homeless 10% of homeless population and majority of population in encampments
Encampments throughout county, on or near waterways
Older single white men who are native to the area with high levels of substance abuse and mental health diagnosis

FINDINGS: Major Typologies

Old-timer Camps

Newcomer Camps

Veteran Camps

Structural

✗ Shortage of shelter beds

✗ Pet Ownership

✗ Relationships

✗ Legal Status

✗ Employment Status

Personal

✗ Dislike of Shelters

✗ Dislike of People

✗ Difficulty with Bureaucracy

✗ Mental Health

FENCED- SAFETY AND PLACE FOR ANIMALS

NEAR WATER OR HIGHWAYS- WHITE NOISE

UNDER BRIDGE OR OVERPASS- PROVIDES WEATHER PROTECTION

NOT VISIBLE FROM ROAD-AVOID DETECTION

REMOVED FROM CITY CENTER/RESIDENCES- AVOID PUBLIC SCRUTINY

NEAR LIGHT INDUSTRY/COMMERCIAL AREAS- SUPPLIES

NEAR SERVICES- ACCESSIBLE

NOT TOO POPULAR/STABLE POPULATION- LOWER RISK OF EVICTION

LOW FLOOD RISK- SAFE

"Wicked Problem"
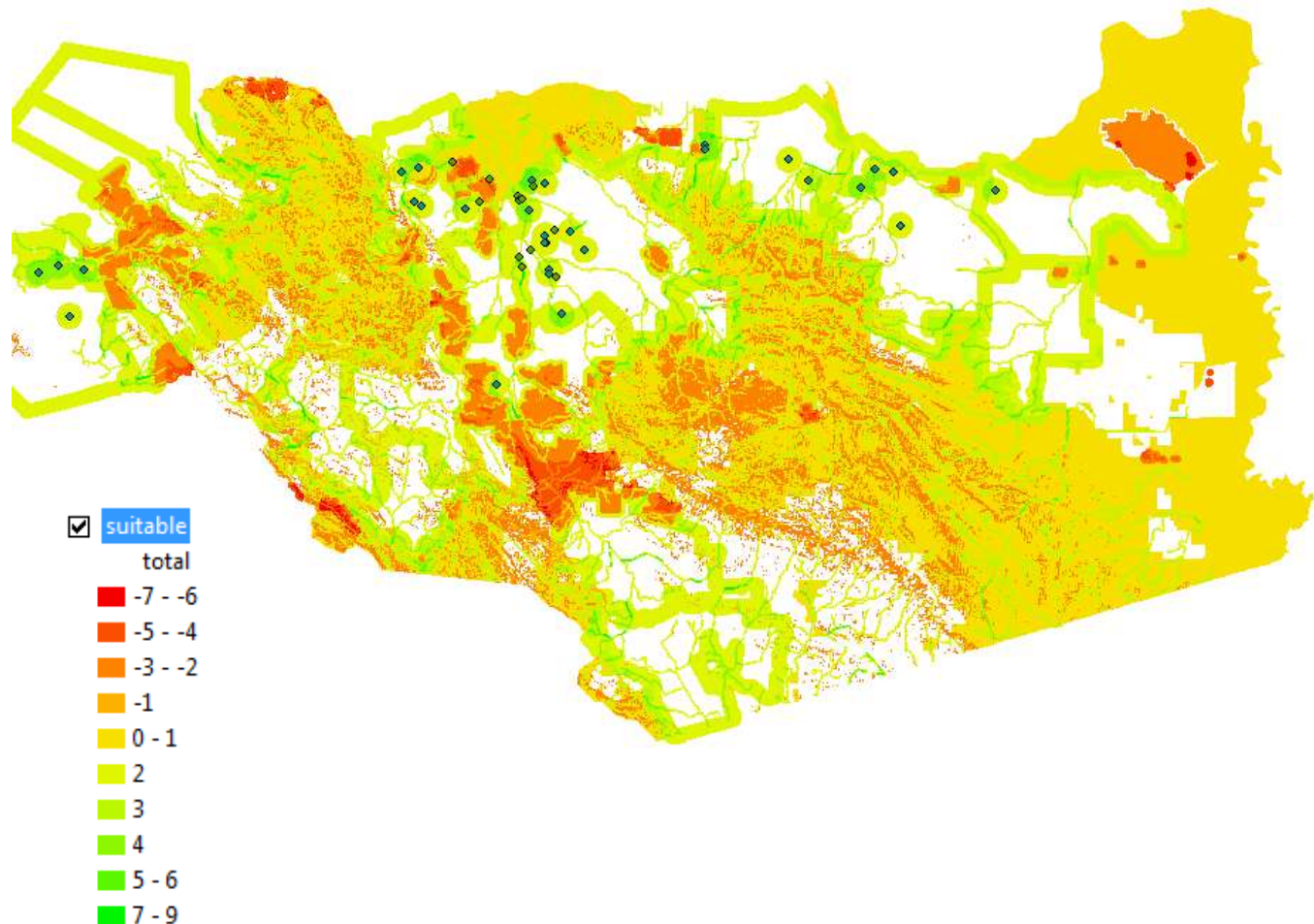
Complex cyclical problem.

Expensive for jurisdictions involved, who have limited resources.
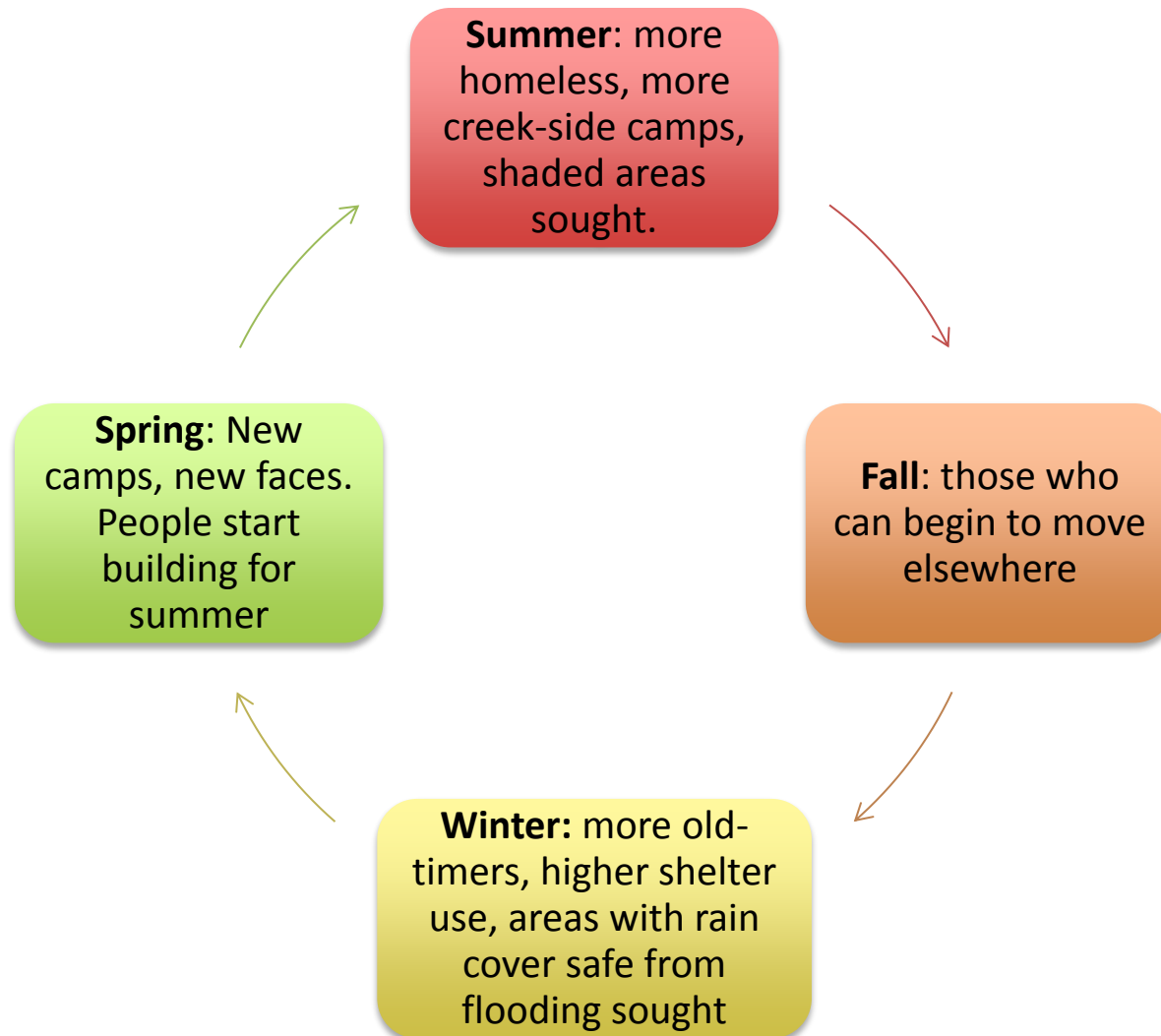
Stakeholders with differing agendas.

Many policy and stakeholder recommendations are contradictory.

Variation in population requires multipronged approach.

GIS Map of Likely Camp Sites

☑ suitable
total
- ■ -7 - -6
- ■ -5 - -4
- ■ -3 - -2
- ■ -1
- ■ 0 - 1
- ■ 2
- ■ 3
- ■ 4
- ■ 5 - 6
- ■ 7 - 9

FINDINGS: Migratory Patterns

Summer: more homeless, more creek-side camps, shaded areas sought.

Fall: those who can begin to move elsewhere

Winter: more old-timers, higher shelter use, areas with rain cover safe from flooding sought

Spring: New camps, new faces. People start building for summer

Resident complaint or Agency survey leads to awareness of encampment

Agency notifies Homless Network

Outreach visits site

Polic visit camp and post signs warning of abatement

Eviction takes place, followed by clean up

New or prior residents return to camp

Camp grows until it reached capacity

You can't get rid of the homeless, but you can set boundaries.

Themes

Successful Collaboration with Homeless Outreach key.

Protocol utilized by all agencies interacting with the population.

Constraints cited included: jurisdictional complexity, funding, capacity, lack of consistency across agencies, lack of housing and services for the population, inadequate mental health or substance abuse services and legal constraints.

Consistency and Seasonal Responses

Community Collaboration

Interagency Collaboration

RECOMMENDATIONS: Analysis

Intervention	Pros	Cons	Where would this work best?	Assessment
Garbage Collection	Creates Political Pressure	Needs local support	Old-timer camps	Should be a complementary strategy
Abatements	Prevents build up of garbage	Temporary results	Bad Camps	Should be a complementary strategy
Housing Vouchers	Effective	Expensive, will not work with some camp residents	All	Should be a complementary strategy
Landscaping	Creates local investment, can be better regulated	Less national, international scrutiny	Urban or Semi-Urban Areas where community has access	Has potential
Collaboration	**Creates Political Pressure**	**Takes time and effort**	**Semi-urban or rural areas where community is invested and land is not too expensive**	**Most promising**

Thank you CCCFCD and Project Hope

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